

Message Text

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REQUEST DEPARTMENT PASS FOLLOWING MESSAGE TO ASSOCIATED
PRESS BUREAU WASHINGTON; AP WILL PICK UP AT DEPARTMENT IF
TELEPHONED.

E.O. 11652: N/A
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SUBJECT: MESSAGE FOR AP

LEAD ALL LAOS
BY PETER ARNETT
AP SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

VIENTIANE, LAOS, MARCH 19 (AP)- THE U.S. PRESIDENTIAL
COMMISSION MET WITH VIENTIANE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS
SATURDAY IN AN ATTEMPT TO SHED SOME LIGHT ON 300 AMERICAN
PILOTS MISSING IN LAOS.

THE AFTERNOON CONFERENCE FOLLOWED THE NOON ARRIVAL OF
THE AMERICANS FROM HANOI WHERE THEY WERE GIVEN
THE REMAINS OF 12 LONG-DEAD U.S. PILOTS AND THE PROMISE
OF INFORMATION ON THE OTHERS.

ONLY NINE U.S. AVIATORS WERE RETURNED FROM LAOS IN
"OPERATION HOMECOMING" IN 1973, AND SINCE THEN THE U.S.
GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN ATTEMPTING TO DETERMINE THE FATE OF
THE OTHERS.

LEADING THE AMERICAN SIDE AT THE TALKS IN A SUBURBAN
VILLA IN VIENTIANE WAS UNITED WORKERS PRESIDENT LEONARD
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WOODCOCK WHO CHAIRS THE PRESIDENT COMMISSION. THE LAOS SECRET-
ARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS NOUPHAN SITHPHASAY HEADED
THE LAOS SIDE.

THE AMERICANS WILL MEET SUNDAY WITH LAOS PRESIDENT
SOUPHANOUVONG AND OTHER SENIOR OFFICIALS BEFORE FLYING
BACK TO U.S. LATE AFTERNOON.

AMERICAN OFFICIALS WITH COMMISSION SAID THEY DOUBTED

THAT THE FAVORABLE RESULTS OF THE VIETNAM TRIP IN TERMS OF RECOVERED REMAINS COULD BE REPEATED IN LAOS, BUT THEY FELT THAT VISIT WOULD AT LEAST HELP ACQUAINT LAOS GOVERNMENT WITH NEW ADMINISTRATION IN WASHINGTON.

THE REMAINS OF 12 PILOTS WERE FLOWN ON TO CLARK AIR BASE IN THE PHILIPPINES ON SATURDAY. THEY WILL CONTINUE JOURNEY THIS WEEKEND TO HAWAII FOR POSITIVE IDENTIFICATION. ARNETT HANOI DEPARTURE COLOR, FOR SUNDAY AYEMS

BY PETER ARNETT

HANOI, MARCH 19 (AP)- AS HE PLACED A FURLED STARS AND STRIPES ON A SMALL BLACK CASKET THE NAME "ROY BOWLING" PAINTED IN WHITE LETTERS, CONGRESSMAN G.V. MONTGOMERY BURSHED A TEAR FROM HIS EYE AND SAID "WE DID NOT GET EVERYTHING WE CAME FOR BUT THIS MAKES UP FOR A LOT."

THE TALL GREIVING MONTGOMERY AND A SCOREOF OTHER AMERICANS WERE OFFICIATING AT THE SIMPLE BUT SOLEMN CEREMONIES AT HANOI'S GIA LAM AIRPORT SATURDAY MORNING FOR THE REMAINS OF 12 AMERICAN PILOTS WHO HAD DIED YEARS AGO IN THE SKIES OVER VIETNAM AND WERE NOW MAKING THEIR LAST FLIGHT --- BACK TO THE UNITED STATES HALF A WORLD AWAY.

EACH CASKET RECEIVED A FLAG, PLACED BY THE MEMBERS AND STAFF OF THE PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION THAT HAD NEGOTIATED THEIR RETURN.

VIETNAMESE OFFICIALS, WHO HAD FINALLY FINALLY AGREED TO TURN OVER THE REMAINS AFTER YEARS OF BARGAINING, HAD TAKEN THE CASKET EARLIER TO THE AIRPORT AND HELPED SET UP THE TABLE WHERE THEY RESTED. THEN THE VIETNAMESE RESPECTFULLY MOVED AWAY TO THE EDGE OF THE AIRFIELD SO THAT THE AMERICANS CLUSTERED AROUND THE CASKETS AND THE HUGE U.S. AIRFORCE C 141 LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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STARLIFTER COULD MOURN ALONE.

CRE MEMBERS OF THE GIANT PLANE, AND MILITARY MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSIONS STAFF IN FULL UNIFORM, SOLEMNLY CARRIED THE CASKETS INTO THE BELLY OF THE AIRCRAFT PAST THE OTHER SALUTING AMERICANS.

IN THE BACKGROUND WERE REMINDERS OF THE WAR THESE PILOTS HAD FOUGHT AND DIED IN. A CONCRETE BUILDING STILL IN RUINS COULD BE SEEN IN A NEARBY PADDYFIELD, BOMBED BY U.S. PLANES DURING THE WAR ACCORDING TO VIETNAMESE OFFICIALS. STANDING ON THE AIRFIELD WAS A U.S. BUILT C 130 TRANSPORT PLANE ONCE FLOWN BY THE OLD SAIGON AIRFORCE BUT NOW IN USE BY THE WAR'S VICTORS.

BUT THE MOST TOUCHING REMINDER OF THE WAR WAS THE ROW OR FLAG - DRAPED BLACK CASKETS CONTAINING THE REMAINS OF THE OF THE PILOTS.

CAPTAIN ROY BOWLING WAS FROM SAN BERNADINO, CALIF. SHOT DOWN 15 YEARS AGO ON 17 NOV., 1965 WHEN THE WAR WAS ENTERING ITS FURIOUS PHASE.

THE OTHERS HAD DIED OVER VIETNAM TOO IN THOSE INTENSE

YEARS OF WAR AND WERE AMONGST THE MORE THAN 2,500 AMERIFANS
MISSING AND OTHERWISE UNACCOUNTED FOR.

THE PASSIONS THAT SENT THESE YONG MEN TO VIETNAM IN THE
FIRST PLACE, AND THEN PREVENTED THEIR RETURN HOME TO AMERICA
FOR SO MANY YEARS, SEEMED TO HAVE COOLED NOW.

THAT WAS EVIDENT AFTER THE CEREMONY SATURDAY WHEN THE
AMERICAN COMMISSION, AND THE VIETNAMESE OFFICIALS THEY
HAD BEEN MEETING FOR SEVERAL DAYS, MET OVER COFFEE AT THE
AIRPORT TERMINAL FOR THE LAST TIME.

"WE HOPE YOU COME BACK SOON," THE VIETNAMESE DEPUTY
FOREIGN MINISTER, PHAN HIEN, TOLD LEONARD WOODCOCK, THE
U.S. PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION CHAIRMAN. WOODCOCK RESPONDED
THAT HE SHARED THE SAME HOPE, AND SEEMED TO MEAN IT.

THERE ARE STILL MANY AMERICANS MISSING IN VIETNAM.
U.S. OFFICIALS SAY THEY HAVE NO ILLUSIVONS, AND THAT MOST
OF THEM WILL NEVER BE ACCOUNTED FOR. BUT SOME MAY BE.

TO CONGRESSMAN MONTGOMERY WHO DID MUCH TO GET THESE
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TALKS GOING IN THE FIRST PLACE THOUGH HIS HOUSE SELECT
COMMITTEE ON THE MISSING INSOUTH EAST ASIA, THE ROW OF
SMALL BLACK CASKETS LAID OUT NEATLY IN THE REAR COMPART-
MENT OF THE BIG U.S. AIRFORCE PLANE WAS EVIDENCE ENOUGH
THAT "PERSISTENCE AND GOODWILL CAN PAY OFF."
THE REMAINS OF THE AMERICAN PILOTS WILL BE FLOWN TO
HAWAII FOR POSITIVE IDENTIFICATION. ENDIT ARNETT
MESSAGE FOR NEWYORK PHOTOS:

BLACK AND WHITE PICS OF HANOI AIRPORT CEREMONY WITH
CASKETS AND COMMISSION MEMBERS WERE SENT TO BANGKOK
EARLIER SATURDAY AND HOPEFULLY ARE AVAILABLE FOR USE.
ARNETT VIENTIANE.
CORCORAN

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED AP.

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